

Separate Classrooms for Twins: Academic Gains or Losses?

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When it comes to twins, the dialogue surrounding the question of separate or same classrooms is probably the longest and most heated of twin-based controversies. Benefits include, but are not limited to, each twins' having an individual experience apart from the co-twin and the easing of within-pair comparison/competition. Detriments may include social anxiety from being apart and/or more favorable educational experiences for one twin. My view has always been that there should not be a single policy for twins regarding school placement, but that decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, taking each pairs' individual needs and concerns into consideration. I also believe that decisions should be arrived at cooperatively, with reference to the views of the parents,' twins' and administrators. It is also important to note that decisions are never final but can be monitored and modified over time.

Studies that have focused on twins' school issues have yielded mixed findings. For example, a Dutch study found no achievement differences between separated and non-separated twins at age twelve (Polderman et al., 2010). In contrast, a different study from the Netherlands reported that non-separated twins did better in language and somewhat better in math than separated twins (Webbink et al., 2007). Now a new study by White et al. (2018) has examined such questions using very large samples of Canadian (ages 7 – 12 years) and British twins (ages 7 – 14 years).

Academic achievement was assessed by teacher reports, with British participants providing their own grades at age 16. Intellectual abilities were measured by various verbal and non-verbal tests. Motivation was based on twin's self-reports.

Two key findings emerged from this most recent research effort. The first was that twins (both identical and fraternal) who were separated did not differ in level of achievement, ability or

motivation from twins who were not separated. The second was that non-separated twins were not substantially more alike than separated twins; however, identical twins and non-separated twins were slightly more similar than fraternal twins and separated twins. In particular, twelve-year-old Canadian twins and sixteen-year-old British twins were slightly more alike in achievement if they were enrolled in the same class, with identical twins showing greater resemblance than fraternal twins. Of course, it is difficult to know the extent to which the identical twins' identical genes or same classroom was the major source of their greater similarity.

There is little question that debates over what constitutes the optimal educational setting for twins will continue. Taking into account each pairs' unique situation cannot be stressed enough.

References

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